



I'm Third An American Boy of Depression Years

Memoirs of Robert A. Nordyke MD

*Edited by Eleanor C. Nordyke and Aimee M. Grace
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**reviewed by:
Alfred D. Morris MD**

It's difficult to write an objective, analytic review of a book which is so completely concerned with someone you have known and admired, a colleague of distinguished reputation and a member of a family for whom you have great aloha. Forgive me if I fail in the effort or allow my bias to have an inordinate influence. However, if the truth be known, reading this autobiographical collection of vignettes not previously known to me has greatly increased my feelings of admiration for and the loss of comradery on the passing of Bob Nordyke, the astute physician and gifted researcher that I knew.

Bob's style of writing is not grand. It is personal and just as the introduction promises tells remembered snippets of a lifetime as they were told to his children and family. Each taken individually is interesting, comic or sad, remarkable or mundane, but taken together expose not just the character of the individual but a cast of characters who are real people recording a vivid sense of a place and a time which spans a period of U.S. history which is I believe truly heroic—the roaring 20s, depression 30s, wartime 40s, post-war 50s and 60s. It is small town America, small time family and real live heroics of daily life. One of the readers states that he would rather read this book than *Huckleberry Finn*. I had the same feeling. Mark Twain captured a cross section of mid-America whereas Bob has related a longitudinal view of a life story, infant to grown man, that resulted in an exceptional physician.

This having been said I admonish you not to succumb to the temptation to thumb through this book looking for an interesting note or two here and there that happens to catch your eye. This type of work seems to invite such a reading. The remarkable thing is that the organization by chronological groupings, if read beginning to end, produces a wonderful account of the development of a child to adulthood. This is a portrait of a lively, adventurous, studious child who matures and grows, at times recklessly, at times responsibly, to adulthood. Every parent will recognize this process with a great feeling of concern and empathy.

I don't know if the compilers of the book or Bob himself meant this to be a study in what it is that makes one choose and succeed in a life dedicated to medicine or research. A multitude of studies at Johns Hopkins and elsewhere have tried to sort out what predicts whether a doctor will succeed in medical school and finally become the kind of physician our society desires. One such study found that the students who were most knowledgeable about bioethics were those of Jewish ethnicity, those who were older on entering

medical school, and those who had had a broad experience outside of medicine. Bob certainly possessed the later two characteristics having entered medical school at age twenty-eight after serving as an instructor in the US Air Force during WWII. His stories of riding the rails, firefighting, working on a tuna fishing boat, narrow escapes while in the Air Force and adventures with entrepreneurship attest to a rich and often dangerous experience outside the medical world. I suspect that Bob would have succeeded at most anything he decided upon, or might have been forced into, and that he would have had the same ethics, life view and success. In a very brief conversation with his wife, Ellie told me that he was greatly influenced by his mother's strong character and morality. The other great influence she believes was his experience in the YMCA which at that time had a much stronger religious, moral aspect. What is striking to me is how many parallels there were in his life stories with those in my own. I suspect that many if not most physicians and their families will have the same reaction.

The Foreword by Bob's physician son Thomas and the Preface by his wife Ellie give a loving family assessment and explain the meaning of the title. The ten chapters group periods of Bob's life, each of which illustrates a stage of his development from infant to manhood and describes incidents which undoubtedly molded his beliefs and character. The Appendix compiles the scorecards of community opinion, patients' and colleagues' thoughts, scientific production and curriculum vitae, all of which give a grade of A+. If his medical career seems to have been slighted in the body of the book, it should be noted that Bob had outlined additional chapters

See I'm Third, p. 148

technology systems, health and safety repairs and upgrades, etc), and cutting leadership positions. Service line development will be retarded. Recruitment of qualified staff and talented physicians to our hospital will be jeopardized. Good nurses and clinicians, unable to perform to their potential, will leave. And so will you, the patients...you will be flying to Honolulu to get the quality of care you need and deserve. From being the only profitable hospital in the system, we will lose market share and join the rest of the HHSC facilities swimming in red ink.

Thirty years ago, the state assumed the ongoing responsibility for assuring that our hospital care meets the minimum requirements of care. At this moment, the legislature, for reasons of political infighting, seems to have forgotten that cardinal responsibility. We are being "punished" along with the HHSC by the legislature. The legislators, some of whom are our own representatives, don't seem to understand how we operate, what we need to get the job done, and what effect their vindictiveness and short-sightedness (I can't believe they don't know how to read a balance sheet) will have on us here at the local level. Either they provide for us, or they should get out of the hospital business and allow this hospital to go on its own, or allow another to be built by private concerns. Or at least anesthetize us before they use the axe (when we run out of scalpels).

Why is this so hard? Is Hawaii really such poor state that we can't afford to give excellent health care to our residents and visitors? Vancouver charges a \$10 exit fee to fund its airport. We could do the same for visitors leaving our airports and raise \$40M a year to fund not just our hospital's crying needs, but other infrastructural necessities as well. An old idea to be sure, but isn't time to try something that would work?

Editor's Note:

Steven M. Moser, M.D. is a nephrologist on Maui and has served as Medical Director of the Maui Memorial Hospital. The name Moser should be very familiar to Hawaii physicians. His father Robert practiced internal medicine on Maui for many years and then became the Executive Director of the American College of Physicians. Bob Moser now lives in Green Valley, Arizona.

This commentary appeared as a column, "Island Voices" in the Honolulu Advertiser. Steve, mahalo for permitting us to reprint this in the Hawaii Medical Journal as a commentary. He can be reached at Moser@maui.net or at 135 S. Wakea Street, Suite 105, Kahului HI 96732.

NHCOE from p. 145

and Queen Liliuokalani and mother of Princess Kaiulani, she died of unknown causes. Pediatrician and NHCOE Fellow **Kelli-Ann Noelani Frank Voloch MD** emphasizes the importance of addressing spiritual and psychological, as well as physical, needs of patients. *December's* choice, **Elizabeth Keawepo'ooleinamoku Sumner Achuck**, lady-in-waiting to Princess Likelike, composed the beloved song *Sanoe* with the future Queen Liliuokalani. She died of diabetic complications. Cultural expert **Nalani-Alua Olds** treasures her great-grandmother's legacy of musical talent and compositions.

NHCOE's 2004 *Hawaii Medical History Calendar*, like those in prior years, is a treasure trove for anyone interested in delving more into Hawaii's history. Perhaps next year's calendar will include a sketch of NHCOE Director **Benjamin B. C. Young MD's** many contributions: he was crew member on the 1976 maiden voyage of the *Hokulea*, has recorded a CD of Irish folk songs, and is the first *kanaka maoli* to have become a psychiatrist! Mahalo, Ben, for this outstanding calendar!

Call NHCOE for further information about the calendar at (808) 956-5826, Facsimile (808) 956-6588.

I'm Third from p. 146

left uncompleted, a great loss to his readers. Although well known to his family, friends and colleagues we will not have his particular insight and literary statement of that period of his outstanding life. What we do have is a synopsis in the form of his retirement speech to the physicians of Straub Clinic June 26, 1995, a witty and insightful snapshot of medical practice at one of the premier clinics and hospitals of Honolulu, Hawaii.

I strongly recommend this book not only for a medically oriented reader but for a general readership. I am grateful for the family members who urged him to write down the stories that he had told them and for the fact that he did what they asked and for the editors who were responsible for making this delightful book available to us all.